

# **Michigan Food Policy Council HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS TASK FORCE**

## **Access Task Force Goal**

80% of Michigan residents will have easy access to fresh and healthy food, 20% of which comes from Michigan, by 2020

## **Policy Problem and Approach**

Public food programs and sources such as SNAP, WIC, Farmers Markets, other federal food programs, and the emergency food network constitute a considerable amount of food and economic impact (worth approximately \$3.75 billion in 2011[1]). These programs are also sources where food access barriers and opportunities are prevalent. It is through these programs that millions of Michiganians access the food they need and where impact is great. Additionally, one-in-ten people in Michigan use a food bank each year[2] and food banks need additional money and resources to meet this continuing need. The Michigan Food Policy Council Task Force on Access explored access opportunities and impediments such as lack of income, transportation, nutrition education, geographic proximity and food program availability.

**State Level policy issues** identified in increasing access to healthy food, and supplying Michigan-produced food, to food insecure citizens throughout the state include:

## **Priorities:**

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### **1. UNDERSTAND & BE ABLE TO MEASURE HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS**

- Collaborate among agencies, universities, & nonprofits to develop clear measures of healthy food access, including baseline and data collection/assessment tools and timeline

### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Implement methods within state departments (or departmental collaborations) to “own” healthy food access metrics such as program participation, outreach, dollars spent, customer access
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### **2. OPTIMIZE ACCESS TO & UTILIZATION OF FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS:**

- Remove barriers to participation through improving outreach and customer service in both enrollment and ongoing participation

- Ensure technology is useful & efficient in accessing these programs
- Utilize all options available (such as federal waivers), to help expand access and simplify procedures for benefit eligibility and enrollment. Program eligibility should enable families to receive optimal support

#### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Survey and continue to improve on-line application processes
- Increase the number of community partners who assist individuals with the on-line application
- Optimize the a statewide food assistance outreach plan to include more partners and increase enrollment in SNAP

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### **3. ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD THROUGH FARMERS' MARKET & DIRECT-MARKET SETTINGS:**

- Support expansion of SNAP, WIC, Project Fresh, Market Fresh, and Double Up Food Bucks at farmers' markets and other direct-market retail (e.g. farm stands, CSAs)
- Ensure technology is available and helpful for increasing access to healthy food for consumers; removing barriers to producers, businesses, and consumers in participating in food assistance programs

#### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Support policies and funding that allow MIFMA to be continue to be the lead in expanding electronic benefits access (EBT) and overall availability of healthy food at farmers' markets, particularly through food assistance programs, and more markets available year round across the state
- Educate & support initiatives that raise awareness of how other direct-market establishments can participate in food assistance programs, e.g. CSAs and urban farms accepting SNAP and Project FRESH

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### **4. MAXIMIZE VOLUME OF HEALTHY, MICHIGAN PRODUCED FOOD IN THE STATEWIDE EMERGENCY FOOD SYSTEM**

- Channel Michigan-grown surplus agricultural crops to food banks and food pantries to build the supply of healthy food available
- Increase planned food production to help supply good food through the emergency food network

### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Encourage food and cash donations to the private sector emergency food network with tax incentives
  - Restore a Michigan tax credit for cash contributions by businesses and individuals to food banks and soup kitchens
  - Expand support for model gleaning programs to channel agriculture surplus to food banks
  - Support pilot venison partnership project to increase healthy, local proteins in food banks
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### **5. INCREASE HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS IN RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS:**

- Understand and document food availability statewide in retail settings; developing baseline metrics from which to measure change
- Adopt and expand model programs from across the country that encourage healthy food availability and access through retail settings

### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Develop statewide mapping of healthy food access in retail settings
  - Establish tools and people in state government to be responsible for measuring healthy food access via retailers
  - Support existing efforts for Double-Up Food Bucks pilot within the retail grocery store setting
  - Engage all state agencies to bring programs to Michigan that incentivize establishing or expanding healthy food retail opportunities in underserved areas.
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### **6. LEVERAGING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS:**

- Partner with such statewide efforts including No Kid Hungry Campaign and Healthy Kids/Healthy Michigan and Pure Michigan F.I.T., to build synergy and effectiveness where shared goals exist
- Encourage the sourcing of local food with program sponsors when working to expand participation in childhood nutrition programs
- Encourage creative use of technology for outreach and promotion

### **Strategies/recommendations**

- Through No Kid Hungry, aim to increase participation in food assistance programs, and develop data collection methods to measure expansion
- Add participation in school lunch, breakfast and summer food program to Governor's dashboard of performance measures

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[1] Including SNAP, WIC, Project Fresh, Emergency Food Programs and meals for older adults

[2] Food Bank Council Michigan, Hunger in Michigan report, 2009